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Held at Headquarters, New York,
on Monday, 27 July 1992, at 10 a.m.

President: Mr. MROZIEWICZ (Poland)

CONTENTS

Operational activities for development (continued)

Coordination questions (continued):

(b) Implementation of the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples by the specialized agencies and the international institutions associated with the United Nations (continued)

Special economic, humanitarian and disaster relief assistance (continued)

Establishment of new subsidiary bodies of the Council (continued)

Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

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The meeting was called to order at 10.25 a.m.

OPERATIONAL ACTIVITIES FOR DEVELOPMENT (continued)

Draft resolution E/1992/L.34 (Activities of the United Nations system in the Baltic States and the Commonwealth of Independent States)

Mr. BARNETT (United Kingdom), introducing the draft resolution on behalf of the sponsors, announced that the Russian Federation had joined the sponsors. He said that the draft resolution stemmed from the desire of all Member States to ensure that the United Nations development system acted in an integrated and coordinated way in its operations in the Baltic States and the Commonwealth of Independent States. Decisions on the subject had already been adopted by the Governing Council of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the Executive Board of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), and the aim of the draft resolution was to address a similar message to the whole of the United Nations development system. The draft resolution was based largely on decision 92/43 of the UNDP Governing Council and stressed the need for an integrated approach and presence in the countries concerned, while inviting the Secretary-General to prepare a report on ways of achieving that goal. The draft resolution reflected views which were widely shared both by Member States and the United Nations agencies and funds, and he hoped it would be adopted by consensus.

COORDINATION QUESTIONS (continued):

(b) IMPLEMENTATION OF THE DECLARATION ON THE GRANTING OF INDEPENDENCE TO COLONIAL COUNTRIES AND PEOPLES BY THE SPECIALIZED AGENCIES AND THE INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTIONS ASSOCIATED WITH THE UNITED NATIONS (continued)

Draft resolution E/1992/L.35 (Assistance to the Palestinian people)

Mr. JOMAA (Observer for Tunisia), introducing the draft resolution on behalf of the sponsors, said that its aim was to express appreciation to the States, United Nations bodies, and intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations that had provided assistance to the Palestinian people, and to

(Mr. Jomaa, Observer, Tunisia)

urge them to continue to do so. The draft resolution was similar to those adopted in previous years, except for paragraph 9, which called for a seminar to be convened on assistance to the Palestinian people in the occupied Palestinian territory and asked the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People to consider convening such a seminar. The draft resolution did not present any problems and he hoped that it would be adopted by consensus.

Mr. ZAINUDDIN (Malaysia) said that his delegation wished to join the sponsors of the draft resolution.

SPECIAL ECONOMIC, HUMANITARIAN AND DISASTER RELIEF ASSISTANCE (continued)

Draft resolution E/1992/L.31 (Assistance for the reconstruction and development of Lebanon)

Mr. AL-SABAH (Kuwait), introducing the draft resolution on behalf of the sponsors, now joined by Algeria, said that the text appealed to all Member States and all organizations of the United Nations system to intensify their efforts to mobilize assistance for the Government of Lebanon in its reconstruction and development efforts. Following the restoration of security and stability in the country, the Government of Lebanon had made great efforts to revive the economy and restore its authority throughout the country. The efforts of the Government and people of Lebanon deserved the support and assistance of the world community, following the long crisis which the country had endured, and he called on all Member States to support the draft resolution, which he hoped would be adopted by consensus.

Draft resolution E/1992/L.33 (Assistance to Yemen)

Mr. DJACTA (Algeria), introducing the draft resolution on behalf of the sponsors, said that the aim was to strengthen the economic and social infrastructure of Yemen, which was facing grave economic problems and pressures, mainly as a result of the weakness of its economy and the long-term consequences of the Gulf crisis. The problems created by the return of migrant workers and the increasing flow of refugees from Somalia had been compounded by rising inflation and substantial foreign debt. The draft resolution welcomed the Round-table Conference for Yemen recently held in Geneva, and urged the international community to contribute to the follow-up

(Mr. Djacta, Algeria)

to that conference. In other respects, the draft resolution was similar to those adopted in previous years and he hoped it would be adopted by consensus.

ESTABLISHMENT OF NEW SUBSIDIARY BODIES OF THE COUNCIL (continued)

Draft resolution E/1992/L.32 (Establishment of new subsidiary bodies of the Economic and Social Council)

Mr. UMER (Pakistan), introducing the draft resolution on behalf of the Group of 77, said that the Group attached considerable importance to the new subsidiary bodies, namely the Commission on Science and Technology for Development, the Committee on Natural Resources and the Committee on New and Renewable Sources of Energy and Energy for Development, which would contribute to the efforts of the international community towards sustainable development. He called on the Council to adopt the draft resolution by consensus.

REPORT OF THE UNITED NATIONS HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR REFUGEES (E/1992/59)

Mr. PETERS (Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees), introducing the report of the High Commissioner (E/1992/59), said that the refugee flows of the post-cold-war era had brought the world's refugee population to an unprecedented 17 million. Their speed, scale and complexity had challenged both UNHCR's capacity to respond and the international community's ability to achieve regional and global security. At the same time, actual or potential solutions to refugee problems were emerging in many areas and, despite a dampening of the optimism experienced two years previously, the impetus towards democracy in many parts of the world was opening the way to solu'ions, the most welcome being voluntary repatriation. The High Commissioner's report gave an exhaustive account of the past year's developments.

The situation in Africa, which hosted some 30 per cent of the world's refugees, remained a priority of UNHCR. The impact of successive emergencies on drought victims, refugees, returnees and internally displaced persons in the Horn of Africa, Angola, Mozambique and Liberia had been particularly severe. In Malawi, the problem of the growing Mozambican refugee population was further complicated by the drought in southern Africa. In West Africa, substantial assistance programmes had had to be maintained pending the

(Mr. Peters)

establishment of conditions conducive to the large-scale repatriation of Liberian refugees; escalation of conflict in Sierra Leone had precipitated a major new exodus of refugees into Guinea and Liberia; and events such as those in Zaire and the Central African Republic, which had involved large influxes of Sudanese, had necessitated further UNHCR intervention. Nevertheless, progress in establishing peace and democratic government in many parts of Africa had improved the prospects for the return home of over 1 million refugees.

Asia had experienced positive developments as well as disturbing new trends. In early 1992, there had been a large flow of refugees from Myanmar into Bangladesh; UNHCR, in collaboration with WFP, UNICEF, WHO and local and international non-governmental organizations, had assisted the Government of Bangladesh in mobilizing assistance. A further problem had been the growing influx of ethnic Nepalese fleeing from Bhutan.

Developments in South-East Asia, on the other hand, had been much more positive. The influx of boat people into the region's countries of first asylum had become almost negligible in 1992; and since 1989 over 25,000 had returned to Viet Nam within the framework of the Comprehensive Plan of Action. Following the signature of a tripartite memorandum of understanding, a voluntary programme to repatriate the 370,000 Cambodian refugees in Thailand, coordinated by a Senior Special Envoy of the High Commissioner, had been launched in March 1992. Since many of them wished to engage in activities other than agriculture, UNHCR had decided to diversify its strategy. To date, some 50,000 refugees had returned home under the programme, 20,000 of them in June 1992. In addition to the immediate assistance provided to returnees, "quick impact" projects had been established, in collaboration with UNDP, to promote the economic viability of affected communities. Unresolved tensions in Cambodia, however, and the fragility of the peace process, remained causes for concern.

In Afghanistan, the acceleration of political and military developments in early 1992 had led to a dramatic increase in spontaneous voluntary repatriation from Pakistan and Iran; some 600,000 had returned since the beginning of the year. Returnees received a cash grant from UNHCR and

(Mr. Peters)

a wheat allowance from WFP. Of roughly 3.2 million Afghan refugees in Pakistan and 3 million in Iran prior to the start of repatriation in 1990, almost 1 million had returned home. Because of unresolved problems faced by returnees, UNHCR planned a field presence to identify needs at the community level, develop immediate reintegration programmes and alert other agencies to emergency or rehabilitation needs.

In the Middle East, UNHCR had been confronted, between April and December 1991, with the swiftest refugee influx in its history, when some 1.8 million Iraqi refugees had entered the Islamic Republic of Iran and Turkey. In response, the largest emergency air transport operation ever undertaken by UNHCR had been launched, in conjunction with a massive emergency procurement operation. By December 1991, over 90 per cent of the refugees had been repatriated. A shelter programme for 62,000 returnee and internally displaced families had been mounted; UNHCR and non-governmental organizations had assisted the return to some 1,500 villages in northern Iraq during that period, and had implemented "quick impact" projects to pave the way for the rehabilitation phase of the United Nations Plan of Action to be implemented through other agencies. By the end of April 1992, UNHCR programme activities had been phased out; UNHCR would maintain a residual presence to monitor returns, and continued to deal with residual problems of the Middle East conflict throughout the region.

In Europe, the tragic events in the former Yugoslavia had produced some 2 million refugees and displaced persons, the largest number since the end of the Second World War. That conflict and the related human rights abuses, including so-called "ethnic cleansing" had given UNHCR its first major operational challenge in Europe for many years. As the designated lead agency, UNHCR, in close collaboration with UNICEF, WHO and ICRC, sought to monitor the security of displaced persons, prevent further displacement and promote early return wherever it was safe to do so. But the worsening situation, especially in Bosnia and Herzegovina, had necessitated a huge humanitarian relief operation. The High Commissioner, following her recent visit to the republics of the former Yugoslavia, had called for decisive humanitarian initiative and, having consulted the Secretary-General and a

(Mr. Peters)

number of Governments, had convened an international meeting on humanitarian aid to be held, at ministerial level on an informal basis, at Geneva on 29 July. The aim was to review the feasibility of returning refugees to places of origin, devise further measures, including means to protect refugees and displaced persons, and, it was hoped, mobilize international support. In the Commonwealth of Independent States, the new Baltic States and Central Europe, UNHCR had focused on emergency preparedness, refugee-law training and information-gathering as part of a strategy to prevent and mitigate potential mass-displacement problems.

Central America had, in recent years, proved a fertile testing ground for comprehensive regional approaches aimed at lasting solutions. Refugee camps had disappeared, largely because of the regional peace process and the related initiatives taken in the context of the International Conference on Central American Refugees (CIREFCA). Returnees currently outnumbered refugees, and voluntary repatriation was expected to continue throughout the year, especially to El Salvador, Guatemala and Suriname. But full reconciliation and reintegration would be a delicate task requiring care and scrupulous monitoring, and the follow-up to CIREFCA was of crucial importance. The time-frame of the CIREFCA Plan of Action had been extended until May 1994, and UNDP and UNHCR had continued to collaborate closely, especially through the Joint Support Unit. As part of the first phase of a plan of action to repatriate Guatemalan refugees from Mexico, UNHCR had established four field offices. Although dialogue between Mexico and Guatemala had been intensified, progress would depend largely on the steps taken towards reconciliation in Guatemala itself. A further problem for the region had been a major outflow of Haitians seeking asylum in neighbouring countries and the United States. The deteriorating political, economic and human rights climate in Haiti had dashed hopes of a speedy end to the crisis; in the prevailing circumstances, UNHCR attached the greatest importance to the principle of non-refoulement and had maintained close contact with all parties to that end.

Women and children, who made up some 80 per cent of the world's refugees, were especially vulnerable to a hostile environment. UNHCR had given priority to advancing its policy on refugee women at field level, having introduced

(Mr. Peters)

guidelines and deployed staff members with specific responsibility for refugee women in Malawi, Thailand and Ethiopia, the latter two in a regional capacity with regard to refugee children. In addition, a Senior Coordinator, funded by the Norwegian Government, had been appointed in May 1992 to oversee the development and promotion of a coordinated policy.

The complexity of recent events had raised demanding operational issues as well as protection concerns at the very heart of UNHCR's mandate. Questions of refugee status, protection and asylum had assumed greater urgency and complexity; the traditional distinction between refugees and internally displaced persons had in some instances become almost meaningless; and the right to seek asylum had at times been jeopardized owing to receiving States' political considerations. The High Commissioner had therefore initiated a comprehensive review to assess how UNHCR's protection activities could be strengthened, and had adopted a three-pronged strategy involving an enhanced emergency response, an intensified search for lasting solutions, notably through voluntary repatriation, and innovative preventive approaches.

Early in her mandate, the High Commissioner had made emergency response capacity a top priority, having introduced measures which included the establishment of a stand-by capacity involving emergency staffing and relief supplies, as well as the creation of emergency response teams for each region. Special agreements had also been concluded with the Danish, Norwegian and Swedish refugee councils to provide additional standby capacity in the form of seconded staff or relief supplies. The new arrangements had already proved their worth in Bangladesh, Kenya and Yemen. Closer operational partnerships had also been forged with other United Nations agencies; UNHCR welcomed the establishment of the United Nations Department of Humanitarian Affairs and the appointment of a United Nations Emergency Relief Coordinator.

It was increasingly evident that truly humanitarian and lasting solutions could not be achieved unless voluntary repatriation was accompanied by comprehensive reintegration and rehabilitation measures aimed at self-reliance and development for refugees and affected communities. Together with UNDP and other development and funding agencies, and in close consultation with the Department of Humanitarian Affairs, UNHCR had been exploring ways to improve

(Mr. Peters)

the dovetailing of immediate assistance with development efforts. The "quick impact" projects, pioneered within the CIREFCA framework, were being jointly applied or planned in other locations, particularly Cambodia and the Horn of Africa.

The prevention of refugee flows was a subject on which the international community had become ever more willing to act. In that context, UNHCR had become increasingly active in actual or potential countries of origin and, in the most extreme cases such as the former Yugoslavia, had extended protection and assistance, at the Secretary-General's request, to internally displaced persons, in order to help avert external flight and, through confidence-building, encourage voluntary repatriation.

UNHCR warmly appreciated the generous financial support it had received at a time when the many crises had imposed unprecedented demands on it and on donors. But the requirements for 1992 were even greater than for 1991, already an exceptional year. More than ever, UNHCR, refugees and returnees depended on, and counted on, the international community's solidarity in providing the resources for emergency needs and durable solutions.

The meeting rose at 11.25 a.m.